

'Then choose,' answered the Chancellor, * between suffering confiscation of your temporalities and recalling your words with your own mouth.' Finally, although the Bishop was spared this indignity, he was forced to recall the interdict by proxy.¹ The story illustrates the relations of the English government to the Papacy. If either party had acted on his theory, if the King had invariably enforced the prohibition of Papal bulls, or if the Pope had objected to its occasional enforcement, the breach with Rome would have been brought on at this period. But it was not the habit in the Middle Ages to carry theory so far as to put it into practice.

Such was the hostile attitude of the English government, and such the friendly attitude of the English Bishops towards the Papal claims, when Gregory returned from Avignon to Rome and commenced operations against Wycliffe. The attack on the reformer in February 1377, which culminated in the extraordinary scene in St. Paul's, had been set on foot by Courtenay and his colleagues without instigation or help from the Pope. It was probably the news of their failure, reaching the Vatican early in the spring, that induced Gregory to issue, in the latter part of May, a series of bulls to various authorities in England, ordering the arrest of Wycliffe. The heresies which the Pope imputed to the reformer were not so important from their doctrinal as from their political aspect. Although abstruse points of doctrine were involved, the interest of the accusation and defence was chiefly political. The heretic was standing for England against Home, for the State against the Church. The bull asserted that he had declared against the power of the Pope to bind and loose, and had maintained that excommunication when unjust had no real effect. He had pronounced it the duty of the State to secularise the property of the Church when she grew too rich, in order to purify her. He had said that any ordained priest had power to administer any of the Sacraments, several of which the Roman Catholic Church reserves to Bishops alone* This doctrine was the point from, which he started in his attack on the prelatie system. It contained the germ of Presbyterianism. The bulls at the same time cleverly attempted to render him

¹ *Coni. Muhg.*, »SE ; *Chr&n. Ang**, 109-1,1.